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DATE: 27 February 2020

TO: 1. Chris Stewart – CS content 27/02/20
2. David Sterling

COVID-19: PROPOSED NI CIVIL CONTINGENCIES PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS

Issue: Co-ordination arrangements are required to be in place to deal with the rapidly escalating situation.

Timescale: Immediate

FOI Implications: An exemption provided under Section 35(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 may be applicable

Recommendation: It is recommended that you:

- note the escalating position in relation to Covid-19 and agree the need for co-ordination arrangements to support the effective discharge of TEO responsibility for wider preparedness;
- note plans for the activation of the NI Hub as the central operations room to support multi-agency co-ordination and shared situational awareness in accordance with the proposed NI Hub Activation Plan attached;
- note that the NI Hub was designed to be fully scalable and agree that the operating model will be reviewed on a regular basis and scaled up/down according to business need;
- request that NI Departments put in place appropriate, proportionate arrangements to

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manage their own preparedness and response and to support the NI Hub via establishment of their Departmental Operating Centres (DOC's) and associated reach back arrangements;

- request that NI Departments nominate Departmental Liaison Officers to operate from the NI Hub when required to ensure co-ordinated working;
- agree that a letter can be issued to NI volunteers inviting them to self-nominate to work in the NI Hub to support the Covid-19 emergency response.

Detail

1. A new infection causing respiratory symptoms recently emerged in Wuhan, China; this disease caused by a novel coronavirus has been officially named as Covid-19. The virus can cause respiratory symptoms ranging from mild to very severe. Covid-19 has shown itself to be particularly harmful for the older population and those with underlying health conditions.
2. Currently the focus of the response to Covid-19 is on 'containment' of the virus within affected populations. However, given the evidence that the virus is rapidly spreading to many different countries the risk of sustained human to human transmission causing a global pandemic has increased. Were this to occur it would have significant and protracted impacts on NI.
3. NI, along with the other 3 nations, has been asked to prepare using a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario. This draws on the existing planning assumptions for Pandemic Influenza and emerging scientific advice in relation to the virus causing Covid-19. The reasonable worst case scenario provides for a clinical attack rate (the percentage of the population who will become infected although this may in some cases be mild) of up to 80%; a case fatality rate (the percentage of deaths amongst those infected by the virus) of 2-3%; and a workforce absentee rate of 17-20% in the peak weeks. In addition it is estimated that should there be sustained transmission that the epidemic in the UK would peak within 2 - 3 months.

4. Department of Health (DoH) acting as Lead Government Department has been managing the health response to date in Northern Ireland. The Health Minister has been attending UK level Ministerial meetings (COBR (Ministerial)) and DOH officials have been participating in four nations meetings, teleconference calls, and sharing of papers, guidance and protocols. As the preparations move beyond the health space there is an increasing demand for co-ordination of the wider non-health work. Co-ordination of this wider preparedness falls to TEO albeit in close collaboration with and guided by DOH. Accordingly, TEO convened a meeting of CCG(Covid -19) Preparedness on 20 February and the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch has been closely monitoring the requirement, including participating daily in a variety of sectoral wide conference calls with Cabinet Office, Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) and other Devolved Administrations, acting as a focal point for NI, sharing information with key NI partners and seeking input on preparedness to inform collective next steps and decision making.
5. As Covid-19 has become more widespread, more impacts are beginning to emerge and the potential cumulative impact in NI is becoming more complex. In addition, the preparedness work is being undertaken at pace and the number of sectoral meetings / teleconferences are increasing as well as telephone queries and calls for co-ordination / information meetings from across the NI Departments, Agencies and local government for advice and guidance is rapidly increasing. Accordingly, and in addition to CCG (Covid-19), CCPB has put in place the C3 leads working group (a sub-group of CCG (Covid-19) which meets on a weekly basis but this is expected to increase.
6. It is now essential that appropriate preparations for civil contingency arrangements are formally established, with appropriate supporting infrastructure to provide effective support to the Executive and to enable Northern Ireland to provide an appropriate response to managing a Reasonable Worst Case situation.

7. A proposal using the NI Command Control and Co-ordination Arrangements (C3) tailored to the needs of the Covid -19 current situation but capable of being scaled to deal with the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario is outlined in the attached NI Hub Activation Plan. This Activation Plan sets out the functions and staffing requirement on a week by week basis through to Easter. Given the fluidity of the situation this may change.
8. In summary Week 1 (2 March) will see activation of the NI Hub staffed only by CCPB Core staff but from week 2 this core would need to be supplemented by augmentees. In Week 2 (9 March) NI Departments should establish their DOCS and provide remote points of contact (POC) to the NI Hub. In Week 3 Departments will be asked to send liaison officers to the NI Hub.

Recommendation

It is recommended that you:

- note the escalating position in relation to COVID-19 and agree the need for co-ordination arrangements to support the effective discharge of TEO responsibility for wider preparedness;
- agree activation of the NI Hub as the central operations room to support multi-agency co-ordination and shared situational awareness in accordance with the proposed NI Hub Activation Plan attached;
- note that the NI Hub was designed to be fully scalable and agree that the operating model will be reviewed on a regular basis and scaled up/down according to business need;
- request NI Departments to put in place appropriate arrangements to manage their own preparedness and response and to support the NI Hub via establishment of their Departmental Operating Centres (DOC's) and associated reach back arrangements;
- request that NI Departments nominate Departmental Liaison Officers to operate from the NI Hub to ensure co-ordinated working; and
- agree that a letter can be issued to NI volunteers inviting them to self -nominate to work in the NI Hub to support the Covid-19 emergency response

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